

HOME ON THE HILL

Memoirs of Joe Matisco

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PREFACE

This book is not intended to be a definitive account of life at the Baptist Orphanage of Salem, Virginia, during my stay at the Home on the Hill from 1938-1951. Rather, it is more a publication of sketches or reminiscences of life on the Hill as I and some of my contemporaries have remembered it. We hope you will find something in our narrative that will bring back some pleasant memories of your own experience at the Home on the Hill.

FORWARD

Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Southwestern Virginia, near a place called Salem, are the remnants of a once-proud kingdom known as the Baptist Orphanage of Virginia. For the better part of a century, this little kingdom was home to thousands of homeless waifs who had been orphaned by a myriad of circumstances. Encompassing approximately 700 acres of prime farmland and other valuable real estate, this pastoral domain was basically self-contained, as each subject contributed a share of the labor necessary to keep the realm operating smoothly. The heart and soul of the undertakings were the entities, which furnished the ingredients for the labor-oriented society to sustain itself. Those were the farm, dairy, industrial arts shops, maintenance facilities, dining room and kitchen, and the cottages. Each was a necessary part of life for the residents of this fulfilling existence.

Life at the orphanage was orchestrated for the greater good for the greatest number. Individuality was not tolerated. Two things necessary to the efficient operation of the orphanage, which included a rigid schedule and strict obedience to the rules, were both deeply engrained into the daily life of this cohesive enclave. Residents on the Hill ate, slept, worked, and played to an inflexible system of bells. Any deviation from the schedule was promptly squelched on the spot. Anyone who refused to follow the pre-set schedule was dealt with swiftly and harshly. In this case, everyone understood the rules were not made to be broken, but were to be obeyed! It was a busy life, and young minds and bodies adapted readily to the challenge as they were integrated into the system under the guiding hands of the ever-present supervisor.

Life would seem to be perfect in such a bucolic setting, but that was not always the case. In some instances, children had been forcibly separated from familiar surroundings and deposited in an unfamiliar setting many miles away. This created confusion and heartache for some of those involved, which sometimes lasted for extended periods of time; thus, creating unhappy little charges. Time, however, is the great healer, and eventually most cases were resolved amicably. Eventually, even the little ones came to love, or at least accept, the Home on the Hill as their own home.

Founded in 1892 by the Baptist Association, responsibility for everything at the Baptist orphanage rested in the hands of a Board of Trustees; however, daily

operation of the Home lay in the hands of a Superintendent who served at the pleasure of and was responsible to the Board. He had the final word on every facet of everyday life on the Hill. During the Golden Age of the orphanage, this authority rested in the capable hands of Raymond Franklin Hough, Sr. From 1928-1956, he served as a kind of Benevolent Dictator for all matters concerning life on the Hill.

While Ray Hough held the reigns, the Orphanage succeeded beyond its greatest expectations. More than anyone else, Mr. Hough was responsible for moving the Home on the Hill from a turn-of-the-century Orphan Asylum into a vibrant place for kids who needed a home.

ARRIVAL ON THE HILL

The day we arrived at the Orphanage was a traumatic experience for all involved. It was the beginning of the transition from the intimacy of private life to the impersonal sphere of institutional living that left an indelible mark on all who lived it. Each person handled the encounter in his or her own way. Few, if any of us, will ever forget that day.

The little black coupe inched its way slowly up the incline that guarded the Home on the Hill from outsiders. Its motor purred as it wound its way upward, past the iron fence atop the concrete wall along the side of the road. Slowly, but surely, the vehicle made its way past the various buildings that lined our journey up the grade. The driver, a kindly, middle-aged social worker, spoke softly to her two passengers, as if to reassure them. Alec, the older of the two brothers, slouched down in the front seat next to Miss Fletcher, as if he feared to get a glimpse of the future. He was carsick and homesick simultaneously. Perhaps, he was just old enough to realize that a dramatic change was about to alter their lives forever. Joe, the younger boy, sat erect in the space behind the driver, taking in all the sights and sounds of their soon-to-be-new environment. From time to time, he smiled, as if oblivious to what awaited them.

As the small auto rounded the corner at the top of the hill in front of a strange-looking building, the scene was bathed in bright sunlight; it was mid-June, and the brothers had entered a whole new world. It was all green and clean; quite unlike the dirty, grimy landscape they were leaving behind. Poor Alec was too miserable to enjoy the view, but Joe smiled and seemed to enjoy every minute in these new surroundings. After continuing for about a quarter of a mile, Miss Fletcher stopped the vehicle in front of a two-story brick building that appeared to be brand new, which unknown to us, it was; Straley-Kinchloe Infirmary, as the building was called, had recently re-opened after burning down the previous year. As we alighted from the coupe, the atmosphere was a little bewildering, because there were a lot of young people milling about, and we were unaccustomed to seeing so many people in one place. We learned later that this was a common scene when newcomers arrived on campus.

Joe, the more adventuresome of the brothers, approached a group of the “welcoming committees;” he was about to start a conversation when the biggest one of the group threw out a strange question, “Do you tattle or wet the bed?” Before Joe could gather his wits to answer, the inquirer socked the newcomer in the face and took off. Now, Joe was more startled than hurt by the punch, so he just stood there with a puzzled look on his face. He had just been introduced to life at the Home on the Hill.

Miss Fletcher took the two boys into the Infirmary, where she turned them over to the nurse in charge. We said our goodbyes to Miss Fletcher, the Good Samaritan, who was responsible for giving us a new life. Over the years, she was our only link to the past, as she corresponded with us from time to time until she retired in the mid-1950’s. When the doctor arrived for his daily rounds that evening, he gave us a cursory physical examination and pronounced us fit to be moved to a cottage. That night, we talked quietly – wondering what lay ahead, and we slept an uneasy sleep.

THE COTTAGES

When the brothers arrived at the Orphanage in the summer of 1938, there were ten residences for boys and girls called "Cottages." The ones used for girls were called: Shiloh, Hobday, Portsmouth, Longview, and Evans.

The Shiloh Cottage was the newest addition, built in 1929, with funds donated by the Shiloh Association of Virginia. It was a single-story, brick building. The Hobday Cottage had a varied and illustrious history. Built originally as an infirmary, it was replaced by the Hobday Home Economics Building and was finally converted to the Hobday Cottage for Girls. It was a two-story brick building with a full basement. It was named after the first superintendent of the Orphanage, George J. Hobday, who oversaw operations at the Orphanage from 1891-1906. The Portsmouth Cottage was built in 1904 from funds contributed by the Portsmouth District Association of Portsmouth, Virginia. It was also a single-story brick building with a full basement. The Longview Cottage was constructed in 1926 and was a replacement for the Sallie Carpenter Cottage, which started out as the Superintendent's residence. It was a two-story, brick building without a basement. The last cottage, the Evans Cottage, was named after John M. Evans, a merchant from Salem, Virginia, who donated 16 acres of land and the funds for the residence for the girls.

The five cottages for the boys were called: Schmelz, Ellett, Carpenter, Janie C. Crowder Memorial, and the Boys Memorial.

The Schmelz Cottage was the first of the boys' residences. Completed in 1895, it was named in honor of the mother of George and Henry Schmelz of Hampton, Virginia, who donated the funds. Schmelz was a two-story brick building. The next cottage built for the boys to live in was the Ellett Cottage. It was a brick, two-story building named in honor of T. H. Ellett of Richmond, Virginia. The Carpenter Cottage was set right in the middle of the line of boys' cottages. It was a two-story brick building that was built in 1912 and was named in honor of J. C. Carpenter of Valley Forge, Virginia, who had provided the funds for the construction. Next came the Janie C. Crowder Memorial Cottage. Like most of the other cottages, it was also two stories and built out of brick. Funds for this building were donated in 1920 by Thomas C. Crowder as a memorial to his late wife. The final sentinel in the row of boys' cottages was the Boys Memorial Cottage. It was a

two-story, brick building constructed from funds bequeathed by people in memory of 33 boys from the Orphanage who had served in World War I. All of the residences were heated by steam generated by the heating plant that had been built in the early years of the Institution.

If you are wondering why buildings that were two and sometimes three stories high were called “Cottages,” the usage traces back to the decision of the first trustees who chose the cottage plan of individual residences instead of large dormitory-type structures (Thomas Pugh, Grain, p. 60). According to Pugh, “we find this decision clearly stated in a report to the General Association, dated November 10, 1890...” (Ibid)

Upon awakening on the second day on the Hill, Alec and Joe learned they had been assigned to Memorial Cottage. This was in keeping with the policy of having siblings together as much as possible. When we arrived at Memorial Cottage, we were greeted by a mixed group of curious on-lookers. Clearly, life in a cottage was going to be a whole new experience. The floor plan at Memorial was similar to that in other cottages; however, although each residence had a certain sameness, there were enough differences to make each living space unique. At Memorial, the front door opened into a little hallway, with a staircase directly at hand. On the ground floor, there was a large front room called the study room; the sitting room was adjacent to a little apartment; a back room called the closet room; a bathroom; a shower room; and a wash room. Upstairs were two dormitory room with twelve beds in each, a little bathroom, and the quarters where the housemother lived. In addition, there was a clothes room with lockers and cubby holes for our clothes. Depending on the population on the Hill at any one time, there were usually anywhere from 20-25 kids in a cottage. Memorial’s population was evened out at 24 with the arrival of Alec and Joe.

The daily routine at the cottages was highly structured, as it had to be when that large of a number of bodies occupied one living space. By this time, the Home had adopted the doctrine of mixing up the ages in each residence, so as to more closely resemble a “normal” lifestyle. Our kids ranged in age from 6 (myself) to 22 (the over-aged boys) with all ages between represented. Life ran smoothly in the cottages, because there was a well-defined hierarchy. Your place in the social structure was determined by your age, experience, and physical size. There was

nothing philosophical about the arrangement: might made right! Everyone knew his place in the pecking order and kept to it, until such time as one or another decided to challenge a person higher in the system. Then, the two would find a quiet place, post a lookout, and settle the challenge mano-a-mano. When it was over, the loser slouched out of sight, while the winner strutted around like the cock of the walk.

After they got settle in, Joe discovered that another boy, Harold, and he were the youngest charges in the cottage. Harold had only been there a few days, so, naturally, he was still in a state of shock and was glad to find someone his own age to hang with. The two boys became friends, despite developing a rivalry that saw them competing through the years until they graduated high school together. Harold was a good-sized lad for his age, with coal-black hair and a fair-skinned complexion. His most prominent feature was his eyes – the brightest, roundest orbits one can ever see. Harold had broken his arm as a baby, and it had not been set properly; consequently, it left him with a withered right arm. It never got any better, but Harold learned to cope with his disability. In fact, there was very little Harold couldn't do, including playing sports. In spite of his arm, Harold learned to catch and throw left-handed and he excelled in both baseball and football. Harold had one problem, which he exploited at every opportunity: he slept with his eyes open. When we decided that Harold was sleeping soundly, some of us would pour water in Harold's eyes; we thought it was comical, but Harold was good-natured about it. This probably saved us from many thrashings because Harold could have whipped us easily if he had wanted to do so.

Joe and Alec drifted apart because they tended to spend time with the other boys in their own age group. As a rule, they were non-confrontational; therefore, they managed to remain on good terms with almost all the other residents with the exception of the over-aged boys. Those guys were downright mean and nasty to all the other residents of the cottage. Literally, we were their slaves, and they treated us like dirt. At times, these older kids would fly into a rage and force us little ones to find a place to hid until things returned to normal. The housemothers usually gave them a wide berth and they did pretty much as they pleased, until the day came when they had the effrontery to challenge Mr. Hough's authority. Then, the spit hit the fan, and the over-aged boys found they had bitten off more than they could chew. Very few occupants of the Home On the Hill were sorry to see the older boys leave when World War II broke out, and they were taken into the military.

PLACE AND LIFE AT THE INDIVIDUAL COTTAGES

With so many bodies living in a designated space, it made sense that some kind of system would materialize, which would make us live cooperatively. Sure enough, there was one in place. First of all, every resident was assigned a number as soon as they arrived at the Cottage. The new arrivals got the numbers vacated by those who had left the Hill, so as to keep the system in order. From the first day forward, every kid had to know his assigned number. Everything he or she owned or would acquire in the future would be marked with that number – shoes, clothing, jackets, whatever. That way, residents could keep track of his or her possessions, but it forestalled a lot of arguments over the years. Also, it kept thievery to a minimum because it was too easy to identify property that belonged to another...and the penalty for stealing was stiff!

PROFILES OF THE SUPERINTENDENT AND OTHER SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL

The Home probably could have functioned without the contributions of the Yopp and Lawrence families. The two families were intertwined by the marriage of Earl and Ollie's daughter, Evalene, to George Yopp. Between the two households, they ran the daily operation of a large part of the Orphanage. The George Yopp clan consisted of George; Evalene; and their children, Joyce (the oldest), George Jr., and Dolly (the baby). Roy, George's youngest brother, was married to Margaret, and they had two children, Ronald and Valeria. Earl, the Patriarch of the extended family, was the first one hired by the Home.

Earl Lawrence was the Night Watchman and also supervised the Central Heating Plant. Both jobs were essential to keeping the Orphanage running smoothly. For more than a quarter of a century, Earl was the eyes and ears of the Campus while everyone, including Mr. Hough, slept. Night after night, Mr. Lawrence made his appointed rounds as faithfully as the Pilgrims retraced the Stations of the Cross at the Vatican. Mr. Lawrence was ever vigilant in the pursuit of quiet and safety. Almost like a guardian angel, Earl Lawrence kept the Campus free from fire and other dangers from dusk to dawn. He was like a human liability insurance policy; and, undoubtedly, he prevented many mishaps from disturbing the peaceful sleep of the denizens of the Home On the Hill. Although his duties at the Heating Plant took a back seat to his duties as night watchman, Mr. Lawrence kept the plant operating at full force all year round.

If Mr. Hough was the boss of the Campus during the day, Mr. Lawrence ruled the roost after dark; one could almost call him an extension of the Superintendent. Part of the Night Watchman's duties including being on call if there was a disturbance in a Cottage that got out of hand; then, the cottage mother would send a messenger to fetch the night guardian and the night "Superintendent" would come on the double. Mr. Lawrence's authority was absolute and most of the kids knew it and were careful not to cross him. Moreover, Mr. Lawrence was not hesitant to wield the trusty leather strap he kept carefully concealed beneath his outer coat. It's safe to say that Mr. Lawrence put the fear of God into many a wayward kid's heart. He was tough and kept strict discipline on the Campus during

the night hours. He mellowed quite a lot after he suffered a stroke in mid-life, but he still kept order on his watch.

Ollie Lawrence, Earl's wife, supervised the operation of the Laundry Room for the duration of Earl's tenure as Night Watchman. She was slight of build, but possessed the stamina of a weight lifter. Ollie Lawrence was a favorite with the kids because she was mild mannered and had a good rapport with all who came under her supervision. Mrs. Lawrence was an expert at coaxing "just one more week" out of the time-worn equipment of the Laundry Room. Many times, someone would say the mangle was down, so we couldn't wash sheets that day, but almost like a miracle, Ollie would tinker with the old machine, and it would cough back into operation. For as long as Mrs. Lawrence ran the Laundry Room, the Home On the Hill was kept in clean bedding and clothes. Also, she had a big impact on the lives of many young ladies whom she taught the art of "working." Ollie almost never got the credit due for her contributions to the Orphanage, but she was a vital cog in the system that ran the Home On the Hill.

George Yopp and his family became part of the official family at the Home when he was hired as a kind of utility man; in military terms, George would have been called a "supernumerary." He was truly one who could do almost anything that needed to be done. George was fairly tall and slight-of-build, but he possessed an inordinate strength, which stood him in good stead as he had to manhandle a lot of machinery while repairing it. He was wiry, but strong. Among George Yopp's duties were driving the old flat-bottom truck for farm chores, repairing automotive and farm equipment, and being on call when the laundry equipment broke down. George didn't have any formal training as a mechanic, but he could repair almost anything. It's hard to figure out how much money George saved the Orphanage in maintenance costs. In his spare time, George shared a love of fishing with Mr. Hough, and the two often made trips out of the area in search of the big ones. On more than one occasion, the two families would venture as far away as Tennessee to catch their limit.

The Yopp families kept pretty much to themselves, but on occasion they would share a picnic or watermelon feast with the family on the Hill where their kids blended in with the other kids. After George had been at the Orphanage, a

supervisor position came open at the Barn. Roy, George's younger brother, was hired to run the Barn operation.

Roy was a little more outgoing than George, probably due to being younger. When he came to take over responsibility for the Barn, Roy was inexperienced and had to rely on George's expertise in certain situations, but in a year or two Roy had everything under control and began to shape the everyday running of the Barn in his own style. Roy's wife, Margaret, was fairly young when they moved to the tenet house at the Barn; and, at times, she probably got lonely as Roy was in the field 10-12 hours a day. However, before long, they had children of their own for her to look after, and things brightened considerably for Margaret. Roy Yopp's job was two-fold: he had to supervise the daily care and milking of the 50-plus dairy herd stationed at the Barn, and, in the spring and summer, he was responsible for planting and harvesting the truck garden that furnished all the vegetables used at the Dining Room. At first, Roy seemed a little uncertain in his supervision of the 18-20 boys employed at the Barn. However, in time, he settled in and established a good relationship with his crew. Roy was more juvenile than George and liked to play little jokes on the other workers or even the boys, but they were harmless pranks and just served to let us boys know that he was human. One of his favorite pastimes made the boys laugh. On certain days of the week when Roy had the boys working out in the field about a mile from his house, which was next to the Barn, Roy would get on one of the horses and have it gallop down to the Barn in a lather. An innocent bystander might think that Roy was experiencing a problem, but nothing of the sort. Roy was just hurrying home to catch the opening strains of "Hi Ho Silver;" it was time for the Lone Ranger to ride again. That was Roy's favorite radio program and almost nothing could make him miss those fabulous 30 minutes 3 times a week. Despite an occasional lapse in judgment, Roy Yopp did an excellent job running the Barn. The dairy herd produced up to expectations, and the vegetable gardens yielded an abundance of vegetables for the dining tables at the Orphanage. He remained part of the Orphanage's official family until the Barn operation was shut down in the mid '60's.

WORK ASSIGNMENTS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF WORK AREAS

Milking and caring for the dairy herd of 50-something milk cows was the primary responsibility of the 15-18 boys assigned to the barn crew. Sometimes, the task started as early as 4 a.m. and lasted until 6 p.m. Most days started with the night watchman rousting two little boys about 8-9 years of age from their warm beds to bring the cows in from the pastures.

The young kids loved being trusted with this important task, but at the same time getting up so early was a little spooky for them. If they lived in the same cottage, the boys simply got up, dressed in the dark - being careful not to awaken the other sleepers, and tip-toed out of the house and made their way to the barn. If they were from different locales, the scene was repeated individually, and they met at the barn.

The weather was very pleasant in the Spring, Summer, and early Fall, but Winters could be bitter cold; however, the two little warriors didn't let the temperature deter them from completing their assigned duty. As the boys headed out to the pasture, the guessing game began: Where would the cattle be this morning? Had they made the circle all the way around to the apple trees? Or, had they chosen to bed down somewhere in between the entrance and the approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile around the circuit? Could we be lucky and have them waiting for us down at the bottom of the hill? They almost always guessed wrong, regardless of their time on the job. Consequently, they ended by making the complete journey from one end of the pasture to the other. But, with effort and determination, the herd was located and driven up to the barn area. Once in the barn, the cows were guided into the stall area, which is where they stood for milking. The cows were usually hungry, so they slipped easily into their appointed stall; interestingly, only the youngest heifers, or those newly "fresh" got into the wrong feeding stall, got into the wrong feeding stall, and they were promptly pushed out by the rightful occupant of that stall. The cows were then fed silage and special feed and were then prepared for milking.

Each kid who was assigned to milk had 2 - 3 cows to milk each session, depending on his age or experience. The old hands usually made short work of their milking chore, while the inexperienced ones struggled with their job until it was finally finished. While the milking was being done, the younger boys who were

newly assigned to the barn, were given the job of “ushers.” This was a tricky task, and the older kids didn’t make it any easier. The younger boys were given a shovel and told that they had to catch the waste products given off by the cows during the milking process. Now, the older boys instructed the new kids to stand directly behind the cow they were assisting, which directly contradicted common sense; but, the ushers did as they were instructed until the time came when a cow that had been eating either green grass or green hay coughed, resulting in the unsuspecting usher getting a full frontal bath of liquid cow manure. This act brought howls of laughter from the older boys – who had all experienced the same thing. The recipients of this act of nature sheepishly accepted their misfortune with good grace and eagerly awaited their turn to set-up the next greenhorn. The milking sessions usually lasted around an hour, after which the cows were turned out into the shed, a holding area in summer and a grazing place with the weather was bad. The dairy herd munched on hay and straw while in the shed, which made for waste to be deposited. Naturally, the shed had to be cleaned out after a while. This task was always held during the Christmas vacation. It was an all-day, stinky job and resulted in many temper flare-ups; but, like everything else, it got accomplished in due time.

The barn crew was kept busy during the winter with the cars and milking of the dairy herd, which consumed all the time they had available before and after school. Summer brought the second important job assigned to the barn boys: they were responsible for planting and harvesting a large truck garden, which supplied almost all of the vegetables for the Dining Room.

Summer was a time for fun, but it was also a time for working long, hard hours. After the morning milking, the boys assigned to the barn would either walk or ride the truck up to the acreage set aside for the truck garden – approximately 40 acres of prime real estate. Each summer, the boys planted numerous fields of tomatoes, potatoes, kale, summer squash, cucumbers, corn, and a variety of other vegetables. The planting was done by hand and was a cumbersome task that entailed bending and stooping for 3-4 hours at a time, hauling water to the planting area, and, afterwards, weeding by hand and hoeing for endless hours. It was back-breaking work, but there was no such thing as labor law for the orphans in those days, so it did no good to complain. When it came time to harvest, the bending and stooping process was repeated until everything had been gathered in

and delivered to either the Dining Room or the litter cannery operated by George Yopp.

While we worked hard at the barn, we also engaged in a lot of the play that normal boys our age enjoyed. Meanwhile, we developed a sense of camaraderie that sustained us during hard times. Maybe that's why we look back on those days as "fond" memories.

SCANDALOUS LOVE

Mrs. A was in her mid 30's; a housemother with a five-year-old son to raise. She was rather plain looking, but she had a certain ambiance about her that made her seem attractive in some respects. Roland was 17, rather naïve and shy, but athletic. He had dark, good-looks, reminiscent of a young Roland Gilbert. The problem: he was one of the kids entrusted to her care as the cottage mother where he lived. With that kind of background, their relationship was doomed from the start.

When Mrs. A arrived at the Home, she brought along her two most prized possessions: a five-year-old son and an ageless console piano. She moved them both into Ellett Cottage and settled in for the duration. At first, nothing seemed amiss. She functioned as the person in charge, and Roland was one of the kids under her supervision. But, Mrs. A was not your run-of-the-mill cottage supervisor. She was a frustrated musician, who dreamed of going on to bigger and better things in life. Being at the orphanage was simply a stop on her journey to fame and fortune. Consequently, every chance Mrs. A got, she played the piano for church services or any other activity that presented itself. Additionally, Mrs. A spent a great deal of her time playing the piano for the kids at the Home. Pretty soon, Ellett Cottage got to be a regular hangout for the older boys. It was something different to do, and it helped kill the time. We liked it because she could really swing that old console.

Roland was something of a musician himself: he played the harmonica quite professionally, so it seemed natural that he and Mrs. A would start playing musical duets. Before long, something changed, and they began to play a different kind of duet. They began to hold hands and look into each other's eyes with that mooney-eyed look that some lovers get. After a while, Roland and Mrs. A seemed oblivious to everything and everyone around them.

Mrs. A should have known better, because she was the adult in this circumstance; however, she let the situation get out of hand until some of the older boys suspected that they had consummated their love on some of the occasions when they retreated back into her quarters and didn't emerge for a considerable period of time. Their romance got pretty steamy with a lot of hugging and kissing.

The younger kids didn't really know what was going on, so they just kept to their normal routine. The older kids couldn't believe their eyes, and were puzzled as to what Roland saw in a woman old enough to be his mother. But, nothing seemed to deter them; even after they became the talk of the Hill. Rumors were flying; the other housemothers began to shun Mrs. A and warned their kids to stay away from her cottage. Still, the lovebirds were going at it hot and heavy. We began to wonder why Mr. Hough had not stepped in to put a stop to this kind of conduct.

It seems Mr. Hough had been too busy with another project, which kept him off the Hill for a period of time and so he was unaware of the situation. When he returned, however, he took one sniff and came down on the two lovers like a thunderbolt. He swiftly sent Mrs. A packing with her son, and he enlisted Roland in the military service before his 18th birthday. As far as we know, the star-crossed lovers never saw each other again.

MRS. PERKINS

Each cottage on the campus was presided over by a female supervisor known as either matrons, cottage mothers, or housemothers. She usually earned one of these names according to her relationship with her kids. For my entire stay at the Orphanage, I lived at Boys Memorial Cottage, which was under the supervision of Mrs. Perkins; although she faithfully listened to her favorite soap opera, Ma Perkins, on the radio every day, we never called her anything but Mrs. Perkins. She was a small, white-haired, widow woman of approximately 40 years of age, who had three children of her own. Two of them were grown and had left the nest, but when she came to take over Boys Memorial Cottage, she brought her youngest son, Billy, to live with us. To her credit, Mrs. Perkins never treated Billy much different than she did the rest of us. Consequently, Billy Perkins was just another one of the kids to us.

Mrs. Perkins was a mild-mannered, even-tempered person and was well suited to her being called a Housemother. She was slow to anger, even when provoked. She truly had the patience of Biblical Job for dealing with the various and sundry shifts in personality that were part and parcel of everyday life in a cottage with an average of 25 children from mixed backgrounds. Mrs. Perkins could be warm and tender when given a chance, but she could also be stubborn as a mule when someone bucked her. On the whole, however, hers was a good relationship with all who came under her tutelage during her almost two decades as “Mother” of Boys Memorial Cottage.

Once in a while, Mrs. Perkins would take on a project that was beyond her scope; such as the case in her battle with the bed bugs that were infesting all the cottages at one time. When Mrs. Perkins became housemother at Boys Memorial Cottage, she was aghast to find that every bed on the premises was infested with little vermin - bed bugs. She set out on a campaign, determined that if it took her until her dying day, she was going to rid her cottage of bed bugs. If there was one thing Mrs. Perkins hated, it was beg bugs! Consequently, Mrs. Perkins tackled this project like a general who was going off to war, from which there could only be one winner. For the better part of two years, we tried every method known to man to kill off the bed bugs. We submerged all the metal beds in scalding hot water, to no avail. We scrubbed every piece of metal with kerosene, with no success. We dumped all of the mattresses and bedding out on the lawns and beat them with sticks and paddles

until they got lumpy; we got tired, but the bed bugs didn't. on each occasion, Mrs. Perkins urged us on like a commanding officer leading her troops. Suddenly, after we had exhausted all of our means and efforts, our little visitors just disappeared. We will never know whether we ran them off or if they simply got tired of being hassled and left on their own accord, but we were all relieved when the battle was won. While all the other cottages were still battling their invaders, Mrs. Perkins just smiled and never said a word.

As further proof of her tenacity, Mrs. Perkins could be a tiger when she felt one of her young charges was being unfairly maligned or threatened. A good case in point was her decision to take on the Superintendent when Mr. Hough wanted to "boot" one of the boys from Memorial Cottage off of the Hill for what she considered as unfair reason. It seems that one of the young men, Johnny, was going through a stage in which he was extremely combative. Johnny had a tendency to pick fights during this period, but he was not overly aggressive, simply out of sorts. Now, Mr. Hough's method of dealing with what he considered troublemakers was to make them pack-up and leave the Hill. Ordinarily, everyone took him at his word, and the deed was done in short order; in this instance, however, Mrs. Perkins decided Mr. Hough was wrong in his judgment of the lad and decided to stand up to the Old Man. She was, probably, the last person Mr. Hough would expect to challenge his authority, but he grossly underestimated her courage. For, she didn't back down one step, and Mr. Hough finally realized he had a fight on his hands, so he relented and allowed Johnny to remain at the Home. Johnny did not let Mrs. Perkins' efforts go for nothing, as he went on to become a model citizen and graduate from high school with his class. Not so coincidentally, Johnny and Billy Perkins became the best of friends and remain so to this day.

Everything was not always peaches and cream between Mrs. Perkins and the kids at Memorial Cottage. Both of us had our good and bad days. Mrs. Perkins' oldest son was in the Army and had been sent overseas into a combat zone. This caused her many a sleepless night, followed by an irritable day. She tried not to let it affect her relationship with the boys under her care, but sometimes the relationship became strained; and, we each did or said things we later regretted.

Like children in normal family situations, the kids would say things which were intended to hurt Mrs. Perkins. For example, Mrs. Perkins had acquired a

purple spot on her lower lip sometime in the past, and whenever she got stressed the housemother would pick at it unconsciously. Naturally, the boys noticed this habit and used it to take out their frustrations on her. Many times, she was called an old bitch with a purple lip by a little boy who later recanted. At times like that, our love-hate syndrome came into play. Mrs. Perkins did not deserve that type of treatment from us, but, at times, like all children, we were made at the world and lashed out at anyone handy. When we cooled down, we usually apologized to her, and Mrs. Perkins would take us into her quarters and ply us with tender affection until everyone was back to normal. Many of us left her apartment with moist eyes; but, we weren't crying, for Orphan Kids never cry!

When it came time for Joe to leave the Home On the Hill, Mrs. Perkins had a long talk with him. The two had been together for 12 years and knew each other like Mother and Child. The two of them discussed a variety of subjects, including many things which never come up before. He had grown from a boy into a man under her tutelage, and they had much in common. In retrospect, the boys at Memorial Cottage didn't appreciate Mrs. Perkins as much as they should have; she had played a large role in shaping their lives and in many instances Mrs. Perkins had replaced the Mother they never knew.

HE WAS ALWAYS RIGHT

R. F. Hough was one of those supremely confident individuals who was always certain that he knew everything about everything. Consequently, he made his share of mistakes whenever a situation presented itself that was beyond his scope. A certain incident involving Mr. Hough will serve to make this point clear. One Saturday afternoon, Mr. Hough had a group of boys out in the cow pasture mending fences. He was being his usual strict self, overseeing every facet of the chore. By nature, Mr. Hough was a stickler for having things done in the manner he considered "correct." One thing that would set him off was when the boys got off task and began playing around. Well, it seems that one of the boys, Johnny, was left-handed; so, naturally, he was hammering with his south paw. At precisely the moment Old Man Hough approached his work station, Johnny missed with the hammer and bent some of the staples he was supposed to be putting into the fence post. When R. F. saw this mishap, although he didn't get the whole picture, he reverted to form and thought Johnny was playing around. True to form, he stormed up to the boy and began berating him emphatically. While he was talking, Mr. Hough grabbed the hammer from Johnny's hands and began to instruct the lad in the correct manner in which to hammer staples; he took two or three hefty swings of the hammer and missed wildly each time, but, unfazed, Mr. Hough shoved the hammer back into Johnny's hands and said, "Now, you see how it should be done. Put that Hammer in your right hand and get back to work." With that, Mr. Hough stomped off; while the boys all had to hold their mouths to keep from breaking out in loud howls of glee. As it was, the boys just nodded their heads in agreement: that was just the Ole Man going off half-cocked again.

THE POOR PORKER

One lazy summer Saturday afternoon when the Farm Crew was out hoeing corn in one of the fields close to the main area of the Farm, two young boys, ages 10 and 11, slipped away from the corn patch and made their way up to the place where the hogs were kept in pens. The boys didn't feel like working that day, so they thought they would idle away the afternoon while the other kids picked up their share of the work. The boys started off their hours of leisure by walking around the pig pens and teasing the occupants. After half an hour of that, they got bored and started looking around for some other way to pass the time. As is often the case, idle hands and idle minds are the devil's handiwork and get young boys into trouble. Walter and Sammy began their slide into perdition when they sat on the fence to the pig lot and threw dirt clods at the hogs to make them run and squeal; the more the boys threw, the louder the squeals. The more they stirred up the pigs, the more excited the boys became until they lost all sense of judgment.

Eventually, one of the older piglets escaped from the main holding pen. Quick as a wink, Walter and Sammy took out after the young pig. Round and round the trio went all over the hog lot. Boy, was that fun! All was well and good until the little pig became exhausted from all the running, and it slumped down on its side and rolled over on its back. This action alarmed the boys; so, they started searching for a way to cool off the pig and get it back on its feet. Simultaneously, the miscreants spotted a water hose laying nearby. They made a beeline for the hose, turned it on full blast and turned it on the helpless little porker. The water revived the animal momentarily and our little lads thought they were saved by the bell. Unfortunately, the piglet didn't get very far before its little heart deserted it. The pig fell face down in the dirt, rolled over on its back, and gave up the ghost. It had died of a heart attack induced by the cold water hitting it while it was overheated.

Now, if you've ever seen terror in the eyes of two young boys, it was written all over the faces of Walter and Sammy. Panic set in on our two hookie players. What were they going to do? If Old Man Hough found out about their misdeed, he would tear the hide off their backs with his two-pronged leather strap. Gathering their wits, Walter and Sammy decided on a plan of action: almost by acclaim, the boys took off at high speed back to the field where the crew was working. Grabbing a hoe, they slipped into a row of corn and began working furiously. Perhaps, no one had

noticed their absence. As always, the truth flew faster than a telegraph – when the crew got back to the main farm area the word was already out. Someone had killed a pig, and they'd better own up to their offense or everyone would pay the consequences. Needless to say, Walter and Sammy buckled under the peer pressure and tearfully confessed their misdeeds.

Before the sun had set, the two wayward lads were ushered into the Superintendent's office, trembling in their shoes. On the way to certain punishment, a strange thing happened: Whether Mr. Hough thought the boys had learned their lesson or whether he thought they would never forget this episode for the remainder of their lives, he stayed his hand. Instead, in his most officious voice, the Superintendent gruffly admonished the boys for harming another living thing and for the fact the Home would have to forgo the meat for the table, and he sent them on their way to ponder what they had done. Solomon, in all his wisdom, could not have devised a better punishment for Walter and Sammy, because this incident probably stuck with them as long as they lived.

THE COURTSHIP OF MISS NICK

Mildred Nichols, or Miss Nick as the girls called her, was a petite redhead who was prim and proper in every sense of the word; she dressed in the latest fashion, and she sported large-rimmed glasses long before they became fashionable. She kept her hair short and curled just enough to keep it from being straight. Miss Nick always looked as she had just stepped out of a “band box.” Mildred Nichols was the epitome of what a smart business woman looked like in the 1930’s and 40’s. She had been hired to teach the girls the seamstress trade, along with her business knowledge. Miss Nichols served in this capacity for the better part of 15 years, passing on her expertise to an ever-changing clientele. Miss Nick was a favorite with the girls whom she supervised and advised during her tenure on the Hill.

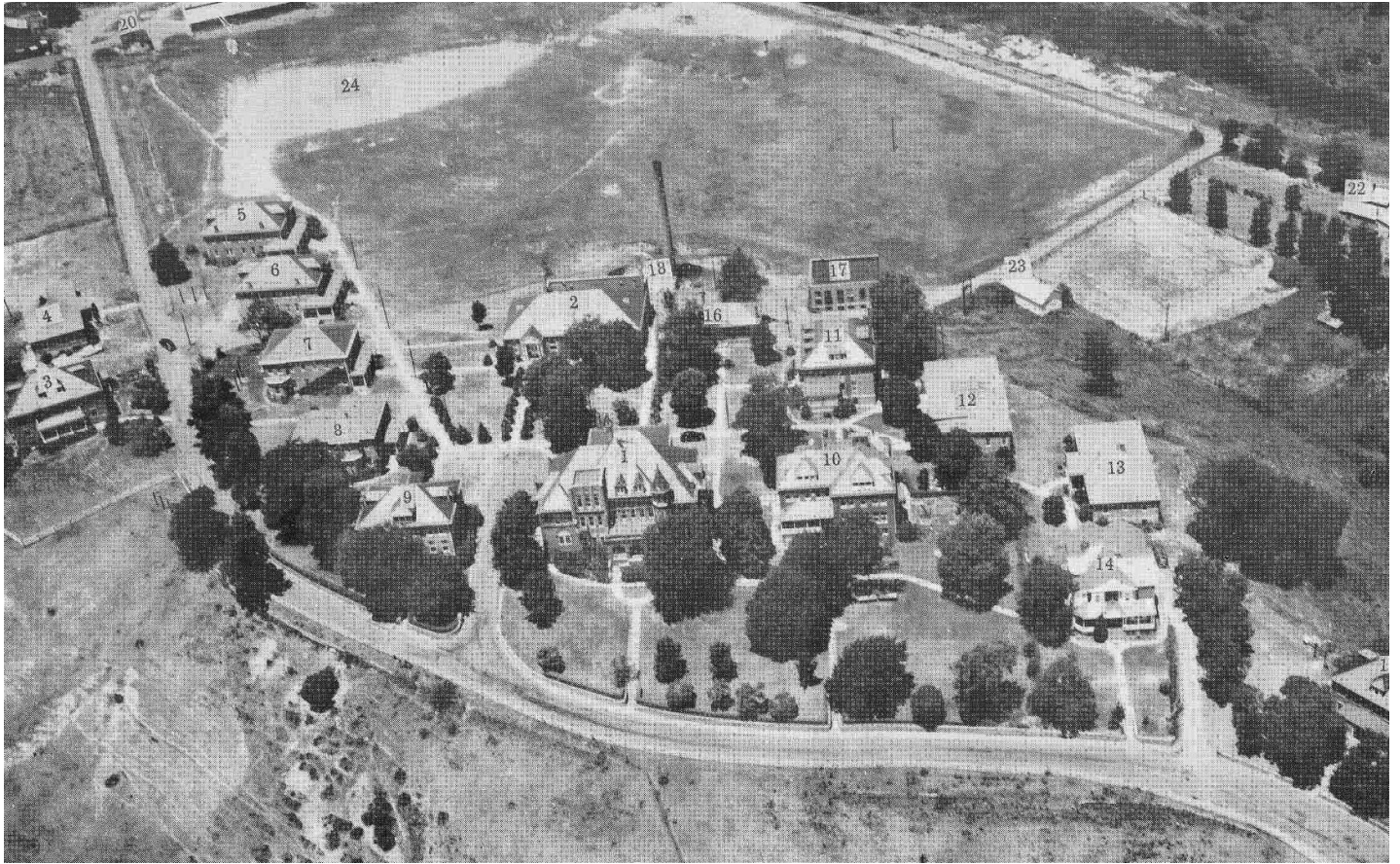
Miss Nichols had an apartment on the ground floor of Memorial Cottage, which was small but well appointed. She didn’t interact with the boys at Memorial Cottage except to occasionally ask one of us to run an errand or help move a piece of furniture. Her private life was kept private, and that arrangement worked well for many years. As young boys growing into adolescence, we were intrigued by Miss Nichols and probably more than one boy had his fantasies concerning the tenant on the ground floor; however, everyone kept their thoughts to themselves and life progressed smoothly.

The Superintendent’s first wife was ill for a number of years, but we were all saddened by her passing, because she was a warm-hearted person who was loved by all of the kids on the Hill – much like a surrogate mother. Dr. Hough was thrown for a loop by her demise and for months he seemed to be just going through the motions; he still oversaw the daily life at the Home On The Hill, but his heart just didn’t seem to be in it.

Somewhere along the line, no one knows when or how, a spark was kindled between R. F. and Miss Nick, and they began “keeping company.” Their romance caught everyone off guard. While the folks at the Orphanage weren’t exactly sure what to make of it, the townspeople greeted their liaison with gossip and innuendo. They became the talk of the town, even in church. When Mr. Hough marched in and took his accustomed place in the pews, many a congregant looked at R. F. with raised eyebrows. They never had the satisfaction of accosting the duo together,

because Miss Nick hadn't set foot in the Salem Baptist Church for man a year-maybe never.

The kids at the Home not only got a chance to see the couple together, we were treated to a show like nothing we had ever imagined. The boys at Memorial had a real bird's eye view of everything and were as giddy as schoolgirls when the courtship became more serious. Right on cue, around 7 p.m., two or three nights a week, Mr. Hough would ease his big, black Buick into the parking space on the side of Memorial Cottage, underneath Miss Nichols' window. After descending awkwardly from his carriage, the Benevolent Monarch would mount the side steps and proceed, hat-in-hand to the front door of Memorial Cottage and come calling on Miss Nick. We were mesmerized by Mr. Hough's behavior, as we had never seen him act so uncertain, like a schoolboy, any time in our lives. Quickly, like little vultures, we seized on the opportunity to take advantage of the situation. We should have backed off and given the Old Man some leeway, but we had the upper hand for once and we played it to the hilt. Each time he came calling, we made a nuisance out of ourselves by hanging around, until the couple were able to hurry out to the car and be on their way. Miss Nick was a good sport about the whole thing, but Old Man Hough acted as he could bite a ten-penny nail in two every time he ran the gauntlet at Memorial Cottage. Our advantage was short-lived, however, as the twosome only courted for about six months and then made their trip to the altar. When they returned from their trip to celebrate their wedding, our honeymoon was over!



AERIAL OVERVIEW OF THE HOME ON THE HILL



OLD MAIN BUILDING

THE COTTAGES



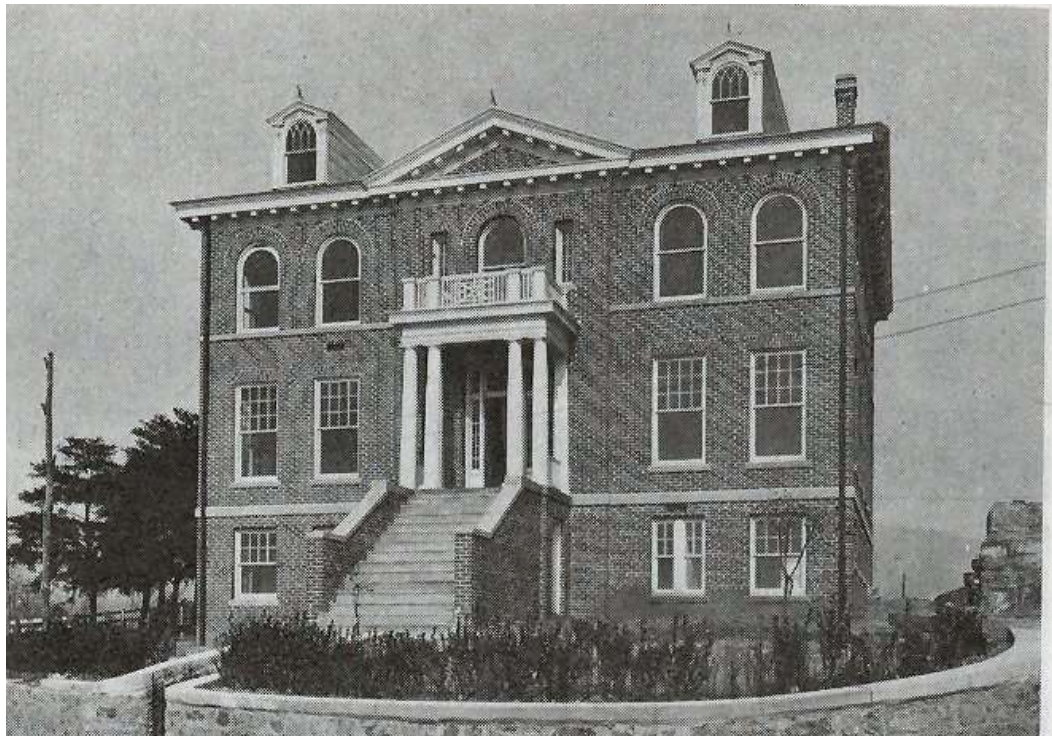
MEMORIAL COTTAGE



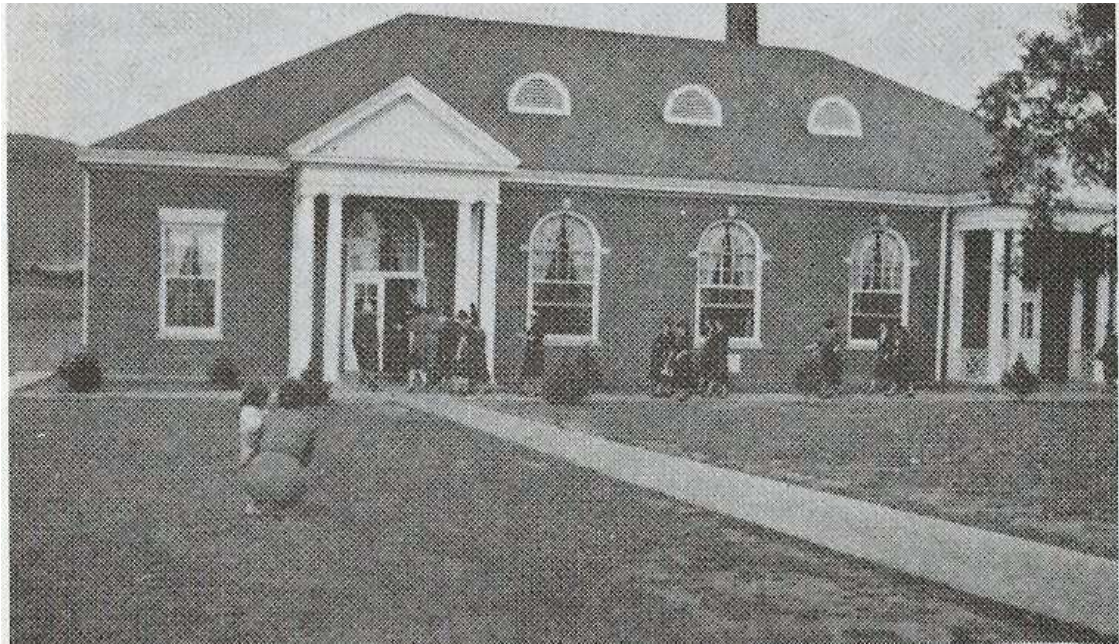
SHILOH COTTAGE



JANIE C. CROWDER MEMORIAL COTTAGE



CARPENTER COTTAGE



HARGRAVE DINING HALL (THEN)



HARGRAVE DINING HALL (CURRENT TIME)



THE SHOP AND LAUNDRY (CURRENT TIME)



THE HEATING PLANT (CURRENT TIME)

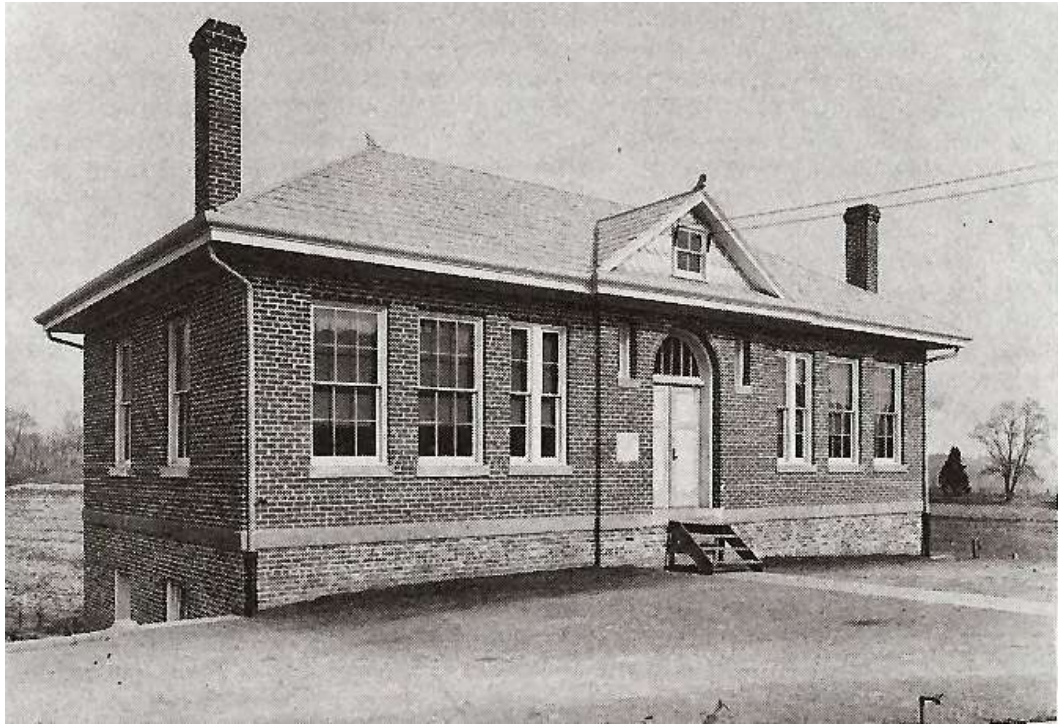


THE BARN AT THE FARM



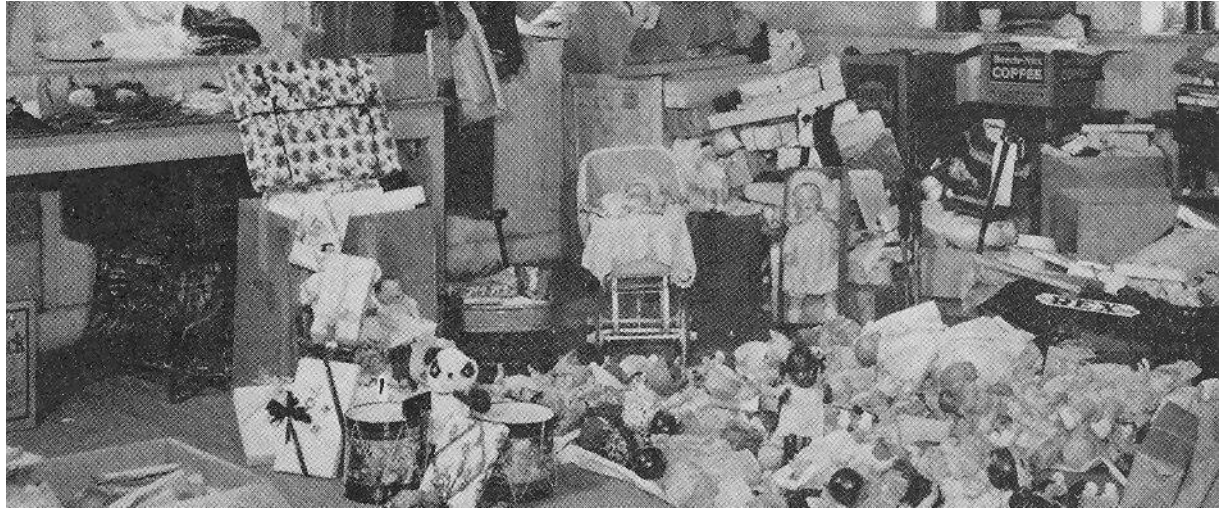
THE MILKING BARN





THE PRINTING DEPARTMENT





CHRISTMAS AT THE SEWING ROOM....AN CHRISTMAS GIFTS

FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS





THE KITCHEN AND HELPERS (TOP AND BOTTOM PHOTOS)





R. F. Hough & son Franklin



R.F. Hough w/wife & George Yopp and wife (Fishing In Tennessee)



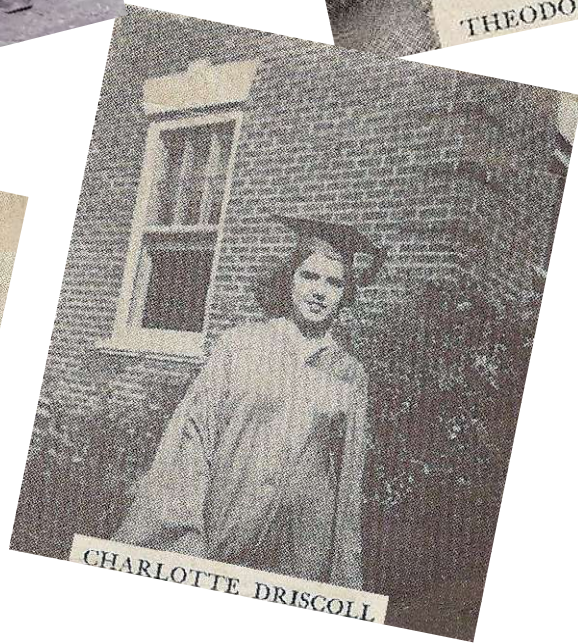
Russell & Paul



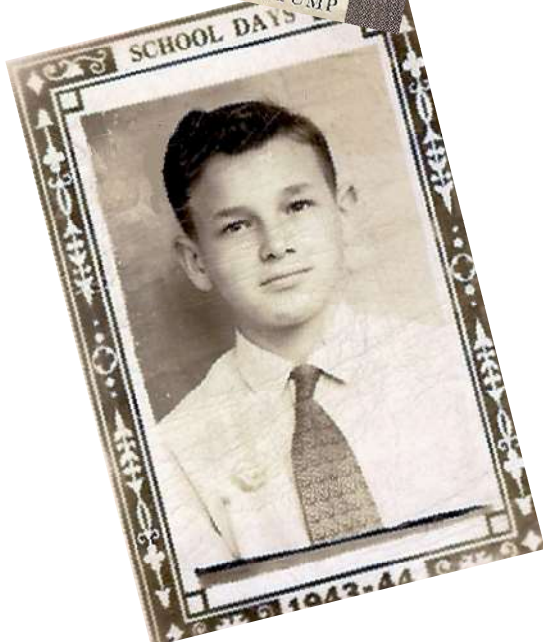
THEODORA SAVA



ALVIN STUMP

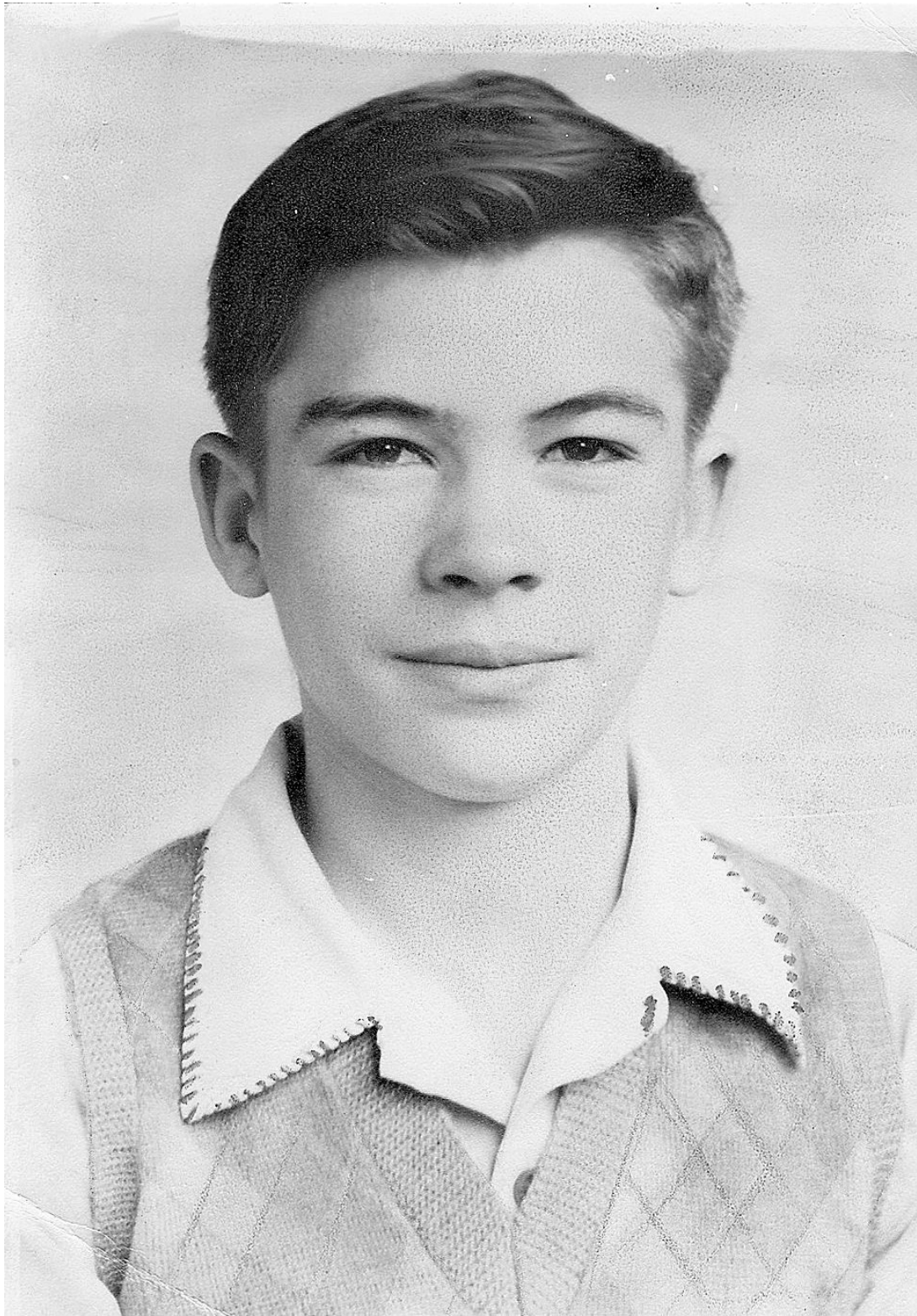


CHARLOTTE DRISCOLL



Buddy Helton

1944-45



JOE MATISCO



Boys & date unknown



KIDS PLAYING MARBLES



NO MISCHIEF GOING ON HERE?



GIRLS PLAYING JUMP ROPE



PLAYING BALL



VBCH Baseball Team



VBCH Football Team





OSCAR HALL, JOE MATISCO, AND BUDDY HELTON (2008)